

DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 445 734

JC 000 670

AUTHOR Cooney, Frank
TITLE General Studies Majors at Salt Lake Community College: A Secondary Analysis of the Fall 1999 New Student Survey.
INSTITUTION Salt Lake Community Coll., UT.
PUB DATE 2000-03-00
NOTE 21p.; Produced by Salt Lake Community College, Department of Administrative Services, Office of Planning and Research.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Community Colleges; Education Work Relationship; *Majors (Students); Student Attrition; Student Characteristics; *Student Educational Objectives; *Student Surveys; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS *Salt Lake Community College UT

ABSTRACT

This fall 1999 survey of new Salt Lake Community College (SLCC, Utah) students compared the clarity of career and educational goals expressed by General Studies majors with other students, and considered implications with respect to student success. General Studies majors, representing 35% of the student population, include students with undeclared majors as well as students seeking to transfer from a general composite education program. Surveys were mailed to 5,196 new students, 1,339 of whom responded for a response rate of 25.8 percent. Due to the voluntary, non-random nature of the sample, the following observations were tentative: (1) over one-third (38%) of General Studies majors had goals similar to other specific majors at SLCC (suggesting 2,250 students could conceivably be majors in other specific SLCC academic programs); and (2) while the majority (66%) of General Studies majors stated that they had a career or job goal, 76% identified themselves as undecided about their major. Citing research indicating that indecision about one's major field of study and future career plans can have a negative effect on student success, the report argued that this large undecided student population was most in need of assistance by faculty and student services. The document concluded with recommendations for student tracking, academic advising, and career counseling. (Contains 14 references.) (PGS)

General Studies Majors at Salt Lake Community College

A Secondary Analysis of the
Fall 1999 New Student Survey



U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION
CENTER (ERIC)

This document has been reproduced as
received from the person or organization
originating it.

Minor changes have been made to
improve reproduction quality.

Points of view or opinions stated in this
document do not necessarily represent
official OERI position or policy.

Department of Administrative Services
Office of Planning and Research

Prepared by
Frank Cooney Ph.D.
Survey and Research Coordinator
March 2000

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE AND
DISSEMINATE THIS MATERIAL HAS
BEEN GRANTED BY

E. J. Williams

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES
INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Summary

The General Studies Associate of Science Degree Program at Salt Lake Community College (SLCC) is designed for students intending to transfer to a four-year school. The General Studies majors include two types of students: one, those who intend to transfer to a specific baccalaureate degree and who want a general composite education program at SLCC, and two, those who are undecided about their major and who need to explore their interests and abilities.

Thirty-five percent of all SLCC college students in the fall semester 1999 were General Studies majors. This percentage represents 7,260 individuals and is, by far, the largest academic program in the college.[1] The number and relative importance of the General Studies major among the college students at SLCC has remained relatively constant over the last five years.

Content analysis of the information provided by these General Studies respondents indicates that almost one-third of them have career goals directly related to the existing majors at SLCC. If this sample is representative for all new students, 2,250 students conceivably could be majors in specific SLCC academic programs. Does having or not having a specific subject major make a difference in subsequent student success?

Perhaps the most important finding in this analysis is the potentially large number of General Studies majors who are undecided about their major and perhaps also uncertain about their careers.

Higher education analysts such as Vincent Tinto have found that indecision about one's major field of study and future career goals eventually has a very negative affect on student success.[2] Beginning in the second semester, Tinto points out that the undecided student often finds it more difficult to find meaning and enjoyment in their classes and school experiences. Part of their situation may be related to inadequate educational goal commitment. In addition, the lack of a connection between classes, assignments and their future life gradually takes its toll making it harder for students to find meaning and enjoyment in their school experience.

The concluding discussion, that starts on page 12, reconsiders the SLCC findings in the context of national research.

The discussion concludes with recommendations for student tracking, academic advising and career counseling.

Introduction

The General Studies Associate of Science Degree Program is designed for students who intend to transfer to a four-year school. The General Studies majors include two types of students: those who intend to transfer to a specific baccalaureate degree and who want a general composite education program at SLCC, and those who are undecided about their major and need to explore their interests and abilities.

Thirty-five percent of all SLCC college students enrolled in fall semester 1999 were General Studies majors. This represents 7,260 individuals.[1] The number and relative importance of the General Studies major among the students at SLCC has remained relatively constant over the last five years.¹ The 6,129 majors in fall 1993 represented 35 percent of all majors at that time.

The New Student survey asked the respondents to write in their SLCC major and allowed them to state "undecided." This format was created to allow further analysis of the undecided students at the college. But all undecided college students at SLCC are classified as General Studies majors and the two groups will also be combined for a comprehensive analysis of General Studies majors.

Background

It can be estimated that 56 percent of all new SLCC students attending fall semester 1999 intended to transfer to a four-year school. Forty-eight of the part-time new SLCC students held the transfer goal.[3] These are comparatively high percentages. For example, in all the community colleges in the state of Washington, only one-third of all new students enrolled with the intent to transfer. Furthermore, only 18 percent of new part-time students in Washington community colleges intend to transfer. It appears that the college aspirations of SLCC students are twice as high as those in the state of Washington.[4]

What is the meaning of the General Studies major and curriculum for student success? How does having a specific lower division major compare to the General Studies major relative to subsequent student success? Does it matter if a student is undecided about their future?

There has been a great deal of research on the factors underlying persistence in college versus dropping out. Arthur Cohen states in *The American Community College* that personal commitment and the intensity of the student's educational goal commitment are central to college persistence and student success.[5] At a certain point, uncertainty of intentions can affect persistence in college.¹

¹Over the past five years there has been a total increase of 4,000 students with General Studies as their major at SLCC. Much of this increase is due to the growth of the high school Concurrent Enrollment program in which almost all students are listed as General Studies majors at SLCC.

¹One research article by Willard Lewallen that contradicts these conclusions was considered and put aside from further consideration in this analysis. See endnote #1 for further discussion.

Research has found that indecision in the first year of college is not necessarily a detriment to persistence and success. But if career indecision and choice of major continues over an extended period of time it can become a serious detriment. In one study, reported by Vincent Tinto in *Leaving College, Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*, nearly 80 percent of student drop-outs were found to have not finalized their career plans at the point they left school. In another study, graduation rates were twice as high among students with a specific career goal compared to students who were uncertain of their future.[2] One of the primary reasons behind the change of majors by college students is their lack of information about majors and related careers.[6]

Based on national averages, it can be expected that three out of four new SLCC students will change their major field of study at least once during college.

There is no doubt that financial difficulties can be a critical hindrance for staying in school and student success. But the citing of financial reasons for leaving can be a rationalization masking the real reasons. Is college rewarding and relevant? That attitude is much more difficult to hold if students are undecided about their future and how the subjects they study in college relate to their future.

The General Studies program permits the student to complete the general education prerequisites of baccalaureate programs and perhaps a few courses in their intended major at a four-year school. In a number of cases, those future majors exist as specific programs at SLCC. Is the student's success at a four-year school influenced by whether the student enrolls at SLCC with a specific major versus a General Studies major? That is a very important question for future research.

Methodology

The data in this report is from the mail survey of 5,196 new students, conducted in November 1999. There were 1,339 respondents for a response rate of 25.8 percent.

A random sample of 1,339 respondents would produce excellent representative results for all new SLCC students. But this was a voluntary, non-random sample and has a known non-representative bias. Previous analysis for the new student survey found that part-time students taking less than six credit hours were under-represented in the respondents. Furthermore, some of the responses of such students were distinctive, e.g., primary educational objective.[3] This suggests the need for a more complete approach to gathering information on the General Studies majors and those undecided about their major.

In summary, no assertions can be made with confidence about the representativeness of the survey students to all new General Studies students, but the significant number of survey respondents provides meaningful data.

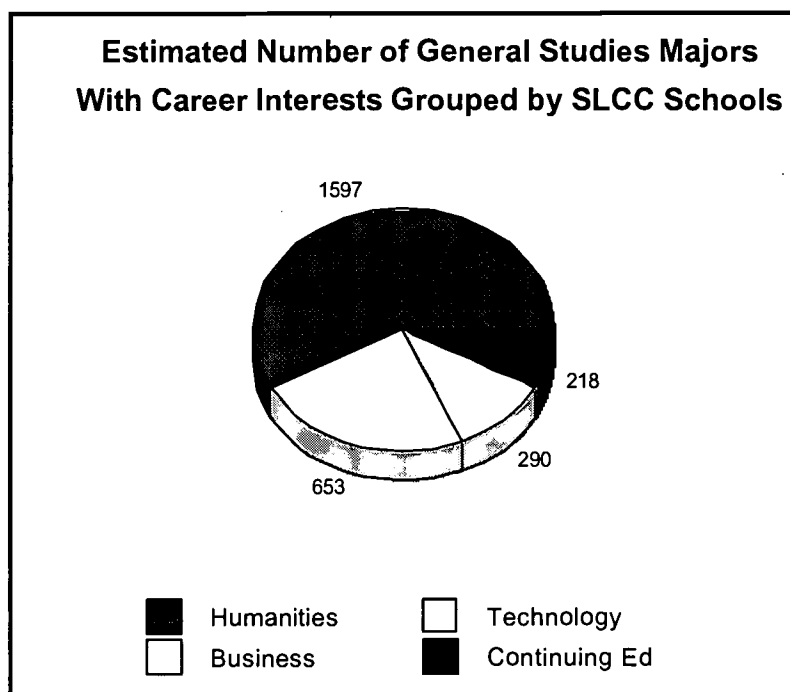
The major questions in this report are:

- # To what extent do General Studies majors have career and educational goals similar to students with specific SLCC majors?
- # To what extent are General Studies majors indecisive and uncertain about their educational goals?
- # Is the first semester educational experience of the "undecided" students and General Studies majors different from their fellow new students?
- # Are the educational objectives and plans of the "undecided" students and General Studies majors different from their fellow new students?
- # How are the backgrounds of these students similar or different from other new students?
- # How can SLCC take action on this research information?

Findings

1. To what extent do General Studies majors have career and educational goals similar to students with specific SLCC majors?

Over a third (38%) of these General Studies majors have educational goals similar to the specific majors at SLCC. This generalization is based on the content analysis of written responses to the survey item: "Write in your goal for a future job or career (write undecided if appropriate)." As seen in the table on the following page, 23 percent of their written goals fit within the majors in the School of Humanities and Sciences, 9 percent in the School of Technology, and 4 percent in the School of Business. Because of the nature of the sample, it is impossible to know if the new student survey respondents are representative of all new students in the fall semester. But, applying the percentages above to the total number of General Studies students, produces the calculations in the following pie chart showing the career goals of all General Studies majors by goal-related school:



Estimates based on a content analysis of the written survey responses of the 470 new student General Studies majors on their future job and career goals.

**Future Job or Career Goal Responses of New Student General Studies Majors:
Grouped by School**

Goal	Number	Percent
Undecided	226	48
No Response	29	6
Humanities and Sciences	110	23
Education (35) Engineer (7) Library Science (1) Writer (1) Publisher (1) Lawyer (5) Psychology (11) Social Work (3) Curator of Museum (1) Theater (10) Computer (14) Medicine (10) Music (4) Vet (2) Interpreter (2) Translator (1) Child Care (1) Communications (1)		
Business & Industry	18	4
Business Management (15) Accountant (3)		
Technology	44	9
Photography (5) Interior Design (6) Health Field (19) Public Relations (3) Physical Therapy (3) Construction (1) Electronics (3) Architecture (2) Information Tech. (2)		
Community and Continuing Education	7	2
Travel (1) Hotel Manager (1) Real Estate (1) Police Officer (4)		
Other	36	8
Homemaker (7) Enjoy what I do (7) Pastor (1) Work for the Railroad (1) Fire fighter (3) Forestry (1) Mortuary Science (1) Get a degree/move to 4-yr. college (9) Something with better benefits (5) Learning & personal reasons (1)		
Totals	470	100%

The undecided students are grouped with the General Studies majors in this table. Tables showing the stated future job or career goals for General Studies versus undecided majors are contained in the Appendix.

2. To what extent are General Studies majors indecisive and uncertain about their educational goals?

The General Studies major is designed for students intending to transfer to a four-year school. It is also designed as a complete lower division curriculum to satisfy all baccalaureate degree freshman and sophomore year requirements. Students who are undecided at the time of admission are also assigned the General Studies major. There are currently no statistics kept on the number of new students who state that they are undecided about their major at the time of admission.

The new student survey contained two questions which provided very valuable information on student uncertainty and indecision. Students were asked to write in their major and were told they could put undecided, if appropriate. Then students were asked to explain their future job and career goals in their own words. Content analysis of the answers to these questions also provided an important picture of student purpose and intention.

Seventy-six percent (355) of the 470 students identified as General Studies majors in this report, wrote in that they were undecided about their major. There was a big difference in the responses about their future job or career. As shown in the following table, the majority of those who reported that they were "General Studies" majors had a future job or career goal. The reverse was true for those students who wrote in that they were undecided about their major.

A Comparison of the Future Employment Goals of General Studies Versus Undecided Majors		
	General Studies Majors	Undecided Majors
Have a Job/Career Goal	66 %	28%
Undecided or no response	34 %	72%

Extrapolating these findings to all students produces the estimate that over 4500 of those listed as General Studies majors are searching for an academic major and/or occupational career. Add to that number all those students who will change their major at least once (estimated at 75 percent nation-wide) and it becomes clear that finding an academic major will be a significant accomplishment for many students.

3. Is the first semester educational experience of the "undecided" students and General Studies majors different from their fellow new students?

The survey respondents were asked about their degree of satisfaction with ten aspects of their first semester experience at SLCC. One question asked about their overall experience and nine questions about their experiences with classes, faculty, and student support services. Mean satisfaction scores on these questions were calculated for "undecided", General Studies majors and all other SLCC majors.

The following table presents the results, with a score of 5.00 indicating that everyone was "very satisfied." A mean of 4.00 indicates that the average response was "satisfied". Scores below 3.00 indicate an average response of less than satisfied.

As shown in the following table, there is not a significant difference between the three groups in nine of twelve experience areas. But the three areas of significant difference draws attention to three potentially crucial aspects of the college experience: academic advising, career counseling and timely feedback from instructors on how the students are doing in class.

A Comparison of Mean Satisfaction Scores on First Semester Experiences for General Studies Majors, Undecided, and All Other Majors

Subject	General Studies	Undecided	All Other Majors
Overall Satisfaction with SLCC Experience	4.06	4.05	4.13
Quality of Academic Advising	3.74*	3.76*	3.92*
Helpful Information on Careers	3.62*	3.58*	3.85*
Efficiency of Admission Steps	3.97	4.02	3.98
Financial Aid Staff Helpfulness	3.99	3.92	3.91
Ability to Enroll in Desired Classes	4.03	4.14	4.14
Timely Feedback from Instructors	3.69*	3.58*	3.80*
Class Sizes Conducive to Learning	4.43	4.38	4.40
Quality of Courses	4.14	4.07	4.12
Ease of Obtaining Campus & Program Information	4.07	3.99	4.00
Helpfulness of College Information	4.04	3.98	4.05
Faculty Responsiveness to Student Needs	4.15	4.02	4.13
Respondents	115	355	869

*The differences between the group means is statistically significant at greater than the .01 level. Based on a 2-tailed T-test with equality of variances not assumed. Respondents indicating that they did not use the program, or did not respond, are excluded from the calculations.

Students were asked in the survey if they had used either the academic advising or career counseling services. The percentage indicating they had not used these services is shown in the following chart. The results below indicate that "undecided" students took advantage of advising and counseling services to the same extent as other new students.

Percent of New Students Stating They Had Not Used Academic Advising and Career Counseling by Major: General Studies, Students Undecided about Their Major, and All Other Majors

Percent Not Using Academic Advising		
10% General Studies	10% Undecided	13% Others

Percent Not Using Career Counseling		
27% General Studies	21% Undecided	20% Others

Twelve percent of all the new student survey respondents stated that they did not see an academic advisor. Twenty-one percent stated they did not meet with a career counselor.

The current Director of Academic and Career Advising at SLCC, reviewed a draft of this report and felt that the percentage of new students not using academic and career advising was much higher than indicated by the respondents in the New Student Survey. If this is the case, it could be due either to such students not responding to the survey, and/or inaccuracy in the responses to the survey question. This question merits further investigation.

4. Are the educational objectives and plans of the "undecided" students and General Studies majors different from their fellow new students?

The majority of all three student groups share the same primary educational objective of obtaining an Associate degree. The percentage for each group is: General Studies, 77 percent; undecided majors, 68 percent; and all other declared majors, 67 percent.

Transferring to a four-year school in order to pursue a Baccalaureate degree is also a primary goal for all three groups. The percentage intending to transfer in each group is: General Studies, 83 percent; undecided majors, 78 percent; and other majors, 57 percent.

The "other" majors group includes all of the occupational education majors, and that underlies the 25 percent response indicating that they plan to earn a degree and then proceed to work in a related field.

**Primary Objective in Attending SLCC
By General Studies, Undecided, and All Other Majors**

Objectives	General Studies %	Undecided %	All Other Majors %
Earn Degree & Transfer	68	61	42
Transfer Before Degree	15	17	15
Earn Degree & Work In That Field	9	7	25
Take Some Courses & Get a New Job	1	6	2
Upgrade Job Skills in Present Job	2	4	6
Other	5	5	4
No Response	1	2	6
Totals	101%	102%*	100%
Respondents	115	355	869

*Column percentages may not total 100 % due to statistical rounding.

The median average length of expected stay at SLCC is the same for each group, four semesters. The General Studies majors have the largest percentage (34%) planning to stay less than four semesters.

National statistics show that six semesters is the average time needed for full-time students to obtain an associate degree, and eight to nine semesters is the average length of time needed by part-time students.[3] In light of this, all survey groups seem to hold an unrealistic expectation of the time needed to complete their degree requirements.

The “no response” statistic is the only indication of uncertainty about the total number of semesters respondents are planning to attend SLCC. As might be expected, the undecided respondents had the highest non-response rate on this question at 18 percent.

Total Semesters Planning to Attend SLCC by Major

Semesters	General Studies %	Undecided %	Other Majors %
1 - 3	34	27	25
4	24	29	27
5 - 7	29	20	24
8 or more	6	7	14
No response	7	18	10
Totals	100%	101%*	100%
Respondents	115	355	869

*Percentages may not total 100 percent due to rounding.

It is surprising that the students who were undecided about their major were not more uncertain about their educational plans. As can be seen in the following table, this group is only slightly higher in uncertainty about staying at SLCC until they obtain a degree. Perhaps it is simply a matter of expectations and optimism both being high when just starting out in the higher education effort.

Likelihood of Staying at SLCC until a Degree Is Obtained By Major

Responses	General Studies %	Undecided %	Other Majors %
Very Likely	53	32	46
Likely	22	33	18
Uncertain	15	21	11
Unlikely	4	7	8
Very Unlikely	4	5	11
No Response	2	2	6
Totals	100%	100%	100%
Respondents	115	355	869

5. How are the backgrounds of these students similar or different from other new students?

In general, the student characteristics of the three category of majors are similar. The statistical profile average is:

- # 18 to 24 years of age
- # taking two to three courses (six to 11 credit hours)
- # unmarried
- # employed and working more than 25 hours per week

Within this statistical profile it can be noted that the undecided respondents, when compared to the other two categories of students, are somewhat younger, with a lower percentage of students 25 years of age and older.

The profile of "undecided" students responding to the survey may or may not accurately represent all SLCC new students that are undecided because of the non-random nature of the survey sample. A more complete identification of those students who are undecided is necessary before any final conclusions should be made about the group.

Discussion

Perhaps the most important finding in this analysis is the potential size of the undecided majors group at SLCC. It is a significant but not a surprising finding given the fact that it has been estimated that two-thirds to three-fourths of all freshman and sophomores are in the process of deciding on an academic major.[7]

The attention given to this group by some of the country's most prominent higher education scholars reflects the large number of undecided students in college. The undecided students are going through a pivotal moment in their lives. To decide on their choice of a major actually consists of four fundamental determinations: 1) identifying life goal priorities; 2) self-assessing personal skills and abilities; 3) connecting those goal priorities, skills and abilities to a career; and 4) connecting a career to an academic major.

Lee Noel and Randi Levitz are two of the most prominent writers and consultants on higher education in American. Their Student Satisfaction Inventory is used by colleges across the country, including SLCC. In their book *Increasing Student Retention: Effective Programs and Practices for Reducing the Dropout Rate*, they assert that most colleges could reduce their freshman to sophomore year attrition rate by one-third. [9:xiii] There are probably community college educators that are skeptical of such a large improvement, but it is a fascinating outlook. They base their assertion on the premise that student retention can be increased by improving student success and satisfaction. The most effective college retention strategies in their experience are those that create multiple programs that directly focus on serving specific groups of students.

Noel and Levitz endorse the National Institute of Education report, *Involvement in Learning*, and its recommendation that assessments of the quality of education should be measured by the documented improvements in student knowledge, capacities, skills and attitudes that take place between beginning and ending college. "If we can help students find their talents

and help those talents grow, then we will have a right to consider ourselves part of a quality institution.”[8:p.3]

Noel and Levitz identify academic boredom and academic uncertainty as two of the key themes in student attrition. They view these themes as intertwined as they view uncertainty about career goals and related academic major as being at the root of academic boredom. They write that one of a college’s first objectives is to help those students who need to come to grips with and think through the kinds of careers or majors that are most appropriate for them. It will take time.

Another important theme in college attrition is unrealistic expectations about college, particularly among first-generation college students and those from lower-income backgrounds who lack family knowledge and role models about college.

Many students do not have a realistic understanding of how demanding college can be. To what extent is this a problem at SLCC? How well does SLCC help students gain a realistic perspective on the demands of college? Is there something else that should be done?

These themes are so pervasive in colleges today that Noel and Levitz argue that colleges should be ready to reach out to every entering freshman to help them decide their majors and career plans and to help them develop college survival skills.[8:p12]

Then there are those students who have decided but who have chosen an academic major for all the wrong reasons. As a general rule of thumb, 75 percent of college students change majors at least once in their college career.[6]

This report and the June 1999 report on the SLCC New Students reaffirms the importance of Parnell’s message that the nation must not neglect the 75 percent or more of high school students who, for various reasons, will not complete a bachelor’s degree.[9]

“A nation that draws too broad a difference between its scholars and its warriors will have its thinking being done by cowards and its fighting by fools.”

Thucydides

Quoted by Dale Parnell in the beginning of his book, *The Neglected Majority*.

Higher Education research across the country has found that a very large percentage of students who begin college with the goal of a Bachelor’s degree, do not achieve that objective. In light of that, how many students who are undecided, or General Studies majors, or in a specific major with a bachelor’s degree as their objective, need to reconsider their career plans and present educational objectives to include certificates and diplomas in applied technology fields?

Noel and Levitz are among the principal researchers and consultants on student services. Across the country they have found college after college putting too much (if not sole) responsibility for retention and student success on student services. “It is now clear that the key people on campus in a retention effort are those on the academic side of the institution: classroom teachers, academic advisors, and academic administrators.”[8:p.9]

Recognizing campus-wide responsibility for retention is the first step in the solution. The next step is to convince faculty that their role is crucial. All faculty are aware of the importance of student-instructor contact in student development and learning. Noel and Levitz say this

contact is a crucial component in student retention. Classroom satisfaction must start with “competent caring faculty who believe that their mission is to reach individual students and have a positive impact on their lives.”[14] This is particularly true at community colleges and other commuting colleges where 90 to 98 percent of the contacts by students with that institution occur in the classroom.[8:p.15]

Many writers who analyze higher education believe that reaching out to the students who are undecided about their academic major and uncertain in their career plans is a very important element in improving student retention and subsequent student success. The University of Utah and Ohio State University are two of the nation’s universities with a specific academic program for undecided students called the University College.

What happens to students when they change majors? Many become undecided majors. To what extent is the transition easy or difficult? Do colleges have a role in the transition between majors? Researchers in the University College at Ohio State University state that colleges do have a role and that it makes a significant difference in student success. Ohio State created an academic and career counseling program specifically for “undecided” students in transition from one academic direction to another. Three groups of students were tracked in a longitudinal study of student success. One of the groups was randomly chosen from the undecided group in the University College and two of the groups were matched on a number of student characteristics, including GPA. The research found that the students who received the help provided by the academic and career advising program were less likely to drop out or be dismissed. The authors encourage other colleges to consider the needs of students in transition. They make one particularly interesting point about such programs. Advisors for undecided students need special skills and knowledge. They must have a broad knowledge of academic programs, knowledge and skill in career counseling and skill in matching student abilities and interests with possible academic career paths. One could say they must be the best.[10].

“Persistence and departure should be seen as one component of the larger process of career and identity formation”
Vincent Tinto [2]

A preliminary review of the literature could find very little analysis of community college General Studies majors. Nothing could be found on the subsequent student success of community college General Studies majors at four-year schools. A study of SLCC General Studies majors who transfer to Weber State University and the University of Utah is underway.

Academic programs for undecided majors can be seen in various ways. At Colorado State University there are broad designated fields of study. It was found in a six-year follow-up that freshman in the “natural sciences undecided” major had an attrition rate (46%), not significantly different from the freshman who selected specific majors. On the other hand, the attrition rate for those who switched majors was 57 percent, and 61 percent for those who matriculated in General Studies.[7]

The undecided student group is substantial at two-year and four-year colleges. Researchers at the University of Missouri-Columbia attest to that fact and describe the school’s program to work with all freshman and sophomores (perhaps 75%) in the process of deciding on an academic major. The authors point out that the immense size and diversity of students searching for their future path makes the task of helping them a daunting one.[11]

One approach to dealing with this potentially overwhelming task would be to offer a "needs assessment survey" to all new students, and then assist those who indicate that they are most in need of help.

A number of researchers hold the position that the undecided group of students should not be considered a single homogeneous group. For example, a student could be undecided on major, and indicate either a low or a high on commitment to achieve some higher education objective. Some could be committed to intelligently exploring majors and careers whereas others could be unaware that they need to make the effort. Twining and Twining, in their student need assessment study at the Community College of Rhode Island, found that 42 percent of the undecided students stated that assistance in choosing a career and academic major was an important personal need.[12]

This research report encourages further efforts to study the significance and implications of students who are undecided about their academic majors as well as those declaring a General Studies major at SLCC.

A short, a supplemental questionnaire for all new students is recommended. This effort would provide comprehensive information on the number of students who are undecided, their educational objectives and plans, and their perception of the importance of the need for assistance in choosing a major and career. These students could be followed into their second semester for an update on their progress in academic and career planning.

Conclusion

In terms of student enrollment at SLCC, the General Studies major is the most significant. The "undecided" students administered through this major face decisions that are critical to their college success. It could be argued that this group is most in need of assistance by faculty and student services.

Endnotes

Endnote 1.

Willard Lewallen's 1993 article in the *Journal of College Student Development* asserts that indecision about career and/or major does not negatively impact student persistence or success.

His work contradicts the conclusions of Vincent Tinto, Noel and Levitz, Virginia Gordon, and a long list of other researchers. Lewallen asserts that their analysis is flawed because it is based on research with severe methodological shortcomings. After careful consideration, this writer has decided Lewallen's work is inconclusive because his research also suffers from serious methodological shortcomings. The data in his analysis comes from a sample of colleges that are so unique and atypical of colleges and college students, that no amount of statistical manipulation can overcome it and provide confidence that the results presented by Lewallen can be generalized to higher education in America (e.g. private colleges represented 59 percent of his sample; community colleges comprised 2 percent of the schools in the survey; 78 percent of the students were enrolled full-time for all four years; the students' average grades were between 3.0 and 3.5; 48 percent of the students were enrolled in honors or advanced courses, and only 6.9 percent of the students were undecided about their majors).

These student characteristics may indeed reflect those students who attend elite higher education institutions, but not community colleges. It would be difficult to find in the educational research a more unrepresentative sample of American higher education. It is even possible to suspect that many of the few undecided students were distinctive from the typical college student--with the luxury of not having to make a specific academic commitment because they possessed little fear that not having a specific major would threaten their future career success and/or financial security.[13]

Endnote 2.

The Office of Planning and Research is conducting a study to identify community colleges comparable to SLCC. Information sharing has begun with two of the colleges, American River in Sacramento, California and Mesa College in Phoenix, Arizona. The criteria used to identify comparable colleges are: fall semester enrollment, percent of students part-time, percent minority students, and percent of students under and over the age of 25. Two other colleges identified for comparability are: De Anza Community College in Cupertino, California and Portland Community College in Portland, Oregon.

References

1. Salt Lake Community College Fact Book, 1998-99. (2000). Page 27.
2. Tinto, Vincent. *Leaving College: Rethinking the Causes and Cures of Student Attrition*. Second Edition. (1993). University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois.
3. Detailed in Cooney, Frank. (1999). *Salt Lake Community College New Student Survey. Fall Semester 1998*. Salt Lake Community College Office of Planning and Research. Page 5.
4. Washington State Board of Community and Technical Colleges. (1998). *1997-98 Academic Year Report*. www.sbctc.ctc.edu/pub/pubayr.htm
5. Cohen, Arthur, and Florence Brawer. (1996). *The American Community College*. Third Edition. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, California.
6. Kramer, Gary, et al.. (1994). Changes in Academic Major Among Undergraduate Students. *College & University*. Volume 69, #2. Pages 88-96.
7. Titley, Robert W., and Titley, Bonnie S. Sept. (1985). Initial Choice of College Major and Attrition: The "Decided" and "Undecided" After 6 Years. *Journal of College Student Personnel*. Pages 465-466.
8. Duophy, Linda, DiGiorgio, Anthony J. (1985). A Strategy for Retaining Undeclared Students. *Journal of College Student Personnel*. Sept. Page 466.
9. Noel, Lee, Levitz, Randi, Saluri, Diana, and Associates. (1985). *Increasing Student Retention*. San Francisco, California.
10. Parnell, Dale. *The Neglected Majority*. (1985). Community College Press, Washington, D. C.
11. Steele, George E., Kennedy, Gary J., Gordon, Virginia N. (1993). The Retention of Major Changers: A Longitudinal Study. *Journal of College Student*. Vol. 34. Pages 58-62.
12. McDaniels, Robert M., Carter, Jennifer K., Heinzen, Cynthia J., Cardrl, Karin I., Wieberg, Anna M.. (1994). Undecided/Undeclared: Working with Deciding Students. *Journal of Career Development; Vol 21, Winter*. Human Sciences Press, Inc. Pages 135 -139.
13. Twining, Kathleen A., Twining, James E. (1987). Perceived Needs of Decided and Undecided Two-Year Community College Students. *ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. ED289546*. Pages 3-37
14. Lewallen, Willard. (1993). The Impact of Being "Undecided" on College-Student Persistence. *Journal of College Student Development*, March, Vol. 34. Pages 103 -111

APPENDIX

Future Job or Career Goal of New Student General Studies Majors: Grouped by School

Goal	Number	Percent
Undecided	30	26
No Response	5	4
Humanities and Sciences	47	41
Education (16) Engineer (3) Library Science (1) Writer (1) Publisher Lawyer (2) Psychology (4) Social Work (1) Curator of Museum (1) Theater (6) Computer (1) Medicine (2) Music (2) Vet (2) Interpreter (2) Translator (1) Child Care (1) Communications (1)		
Business & Industry	6	5
Business Management (5) Accountant (1)		
Technology	15	13
Interior Design (4) Health Field (6) Public Relations (3) Physical Therapy (2)		
CME and CE	2	2
Police Officer (1) Hotel Manager (1)		
Other	10	9
Homemaker (1) Enjoy what I do (2) Pastor (1) Work for the Railroad (1) Get a degree/move to 4-yr. college (5)		
Totals	115	100%

Future Job or Career Goal of New Student "Undecided" Majors: Grouped by School

Goal	Number	Percent
Undecided	196	55
No Response	24	7
Humanities and Sciences	63	18
Teacher (19) Engineer (4) Geology (1) Lawyer (3) Psychology (7) Social Work (2) Theater (4) Computer (13) Medicine (8) Music (2)		
Business & Industry	12	3
Business Management (10) Accountant (2)		
Technology	29	8
Photography (5) Interior Design (2) Construction (1) Electronics (2) Physical Therapy (1) Electronics (1) Architech (2) Health Field (13) Information Tech. (2)		
CME and CE	5	1
Police Officer (3) Travel (1) Real Estate (1)		
Other	26	7
Homemaker (6) Enjoy what I do (5) Something with better benefits (5) Fire fighter (3) Forestry (1) Mortuary Sci (1) Learning and Personal Reasons (1) Have a degree (4)		
Totals	355	100%



U.S. Department of Education
Office of Educational Research and Improvement (OERI)
National Library of Education (NLE)
Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC)



NOTICE

Reproduction Basis



This document is covered by a signed "Reproduction Release (Blanket)" form (on file within the ERIC system), encompassing all or classes of documents from its source organization and, therefore, does not require a "Specific Document" Release form.



This document is Federally-funded, or carries its own permission to reproduce, or is otherwise in the public domain and, therefore, may be reproduced by ERIC without a signed Reproduction Release form (either "Specific Document" or "Blanket").